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Disarmament Commission

220th Meeting
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New York

Chairman: Mr. Martynov . . . . . (Belarus)

The meeting was called to order at 3.25 p.m.

General exchange of views (continued)

Mr. Dimitrov (Bulgaria): Allow me first, Sir, to congratulate you on your election to the chairmanship of this important Commission. I am confident that under your able guidance the Disarmament Commission will achieve tangible results. Our appreciation goes also to your predecessor, Ambassador Andelfo García of Colombia, for his outstanding performance last session.

Bulgaria associated itself with the statement made this morning by the representative of the United Kingdom on behalf of the European Union. For that reason, I will confine my intervention today to certain issues of particular interest to my country.

Bulgaria will be following with keenest attention the deliberations on guidelines on conventional arms control during the current session. Such sensitive issues as the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons and their excessive accumulation in certain regions are on our high-priority agenda today. We share the view that a more flexible and constructive approach to these substantive questions would allow us to achieve further progress in the discussions this year. In this regard, I would like to underline the valuable contribution made by the Panel of Governmental Experts on Small Arms in the report it submitted to the First Committee at the fifty-second session.

The Bulgarian Government is convinced of the need for a comprehensive approach to promote control and reduction of small arms in a balanced and non-discriminatory manner. Such an approach is particularly relevant in view of the excessive accumulation and proliferation of these weapons in certain countries and regions of south-eastern Europe where post-conflict ethnic and political tension still exists. Bulgaria is deeply concerned that the insufficient control and illicit trafficking of small arms in those countries will continue to have a negative effect on the fragile stability of the region as a whole. In order to address this and other challenges to regional security, my country proposed confidence- and security-building measures for consideration by our regional partners, including common activities to prevent illicit arms trafficking. These measures constitute an important element of the initiative for cooperation on security issues in south-eastern Europe launched by the Bulgarian Government last year. According to the procedure that was adopted, these activities are open for further discussion and could be updated on a bilateral or multilateral basis among participating States.

My country attaches prime importance to transparency in international arms transfers. We are of the view that the establishment of the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms is only a first modest step in setting up a working mechanism for transparency. This has to be implemented smoothly and developed gradually for the cause of peace and security. We believe that no tangible results can be achieved in this area unless a reasonable balance is established between the legitimate arms requirements of suppliers and recipients on the one hand and the need to promote arms control on the other.

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In recent years the Bulgarian Government has repeatedly declared its adherence to internationally harmonized guidelines and norms for control of the foreign trade in arms and technologies, controlled by the former Coordinating Committee for Multilateral Strategic Export Controls (COCOM). I would like to recall that as early as 1992 Bulgaria cooperated closely with the United States and other countries in preventing illegal arms deals and transfers. The declarations of the present Bulgarian Government have been backed by the introduction of appropriate regulations and administrative procedures for export-control licensing. In addition, the Special Interdepartmental Council at the Bulgarian Council of Ministers, set up to ensure and monitor the effective implementation of the established export-control regime, is successfully performing its tasks. This is the only licensing body in the country authorized to issue general trading licences to interested companies as well as licences for specific transactions in the same field. Strict control is being exercised to prevent unauthorized arms transfers.

My delegation considers the internationally recognized nuclear-weapon-free zones, established on the basis of arrangements freely arrived at among the States of the regions concerned, as an effective instrument to promote nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. This issue gains even greater significance in the context of the forthcoming second session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2000 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. Furthermore, we are convinced that the regional approach in nuclear disarmament has the additional advantage of producing beneficial effects in other disarmament fields as well. At the same time, we believe that there can be no uniform pattern of nuclear-weapon-free zones, because of dissimilar geographic circumstances and different political, economic and strategic considerations.

In conclusion, I would like to note that as for the question of a fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, my delegation fully supports the view expressed by the representative of the United Kingdom on behalf of the European Union that we need a consensus on its objectives and a balanced agenda relating both to weapons of mass destruction and to conventional ones.

Mr. Vachon (Canada) (*interpretation from French*): In considering the agenda before us, not only can we benefit from last year's deliberations, but we must stretch our minds to incorporate new and varied perspectives. My delegation is sure that under your guidance, Mr. Chairman, and that of the Chairmen of the three Working Groups, this will be an interesting and productive session.

(*spoke in English*)

Canada welcomes the opportunity to address nuclear-weapons issues in this and in other forums, recognizing that global and regional efforts each have important roles to play. The United Nations Disarmament Commission, as a global deliberating forum, can not only increase awareness of issues and envisage goals to be achieved, but also identify principles and offer guidelines to facilitate achievement of those goals. We explored to some extent all of those things last year in relation to our discussion of nuclear-weapon-free zones, but we have yet to identify a focus that will take us beyond the debates already prevailing in other forums.

The prospects for regional initiatives have not been exhausted, but one would be mistaken to believe that such initiatives can be easily brought to fruition if they are to have a genuine impact on regional security. Canada, for its part, is already on record as welcoming and encouraging progress towards the development and implementation of nuclear-weapon-free zone agreements consistent with the Charter of the United Nations, international law and internationally agreed criteria. Such arrangements, freely arrived at among the States concerned, particularly in regions afflicted with conflicts, enhance regional and global peace and security and contribute to non-proliferation and disarmament. Such positive developments cannot be taken for granted, however. Canada also encourages adherence by the nuclear-weapon States to nuclear-weapon-free zone agreements. Last year, my delegation distributed a working paper entitled "Nuclear-weapon-free Zones: a comparative perspective", and we wish to express our appreciation to those who communicated their views to us about the document, which was intended to promote discussion.

On the subject of a United Nations special session devoted to disarmament, we have some way to go, it would seem, before these deliberations will point the way to an appropriate framework and balanced agenda that would attract consensus. We continue to believe that such consensus is necessary if we are to convene a special session that can make a meaningful contribution to the world's work on disarmament and to the ways and means by which that work will be conducted in the future.

On the topic of consolidation of peace, there have been significant developments over the last year that will assist in informing our own deliberations and that, we believe, are fully consistent with the initiative that prompted this particular topic. Of these, two are of immediate interest to this body. First and foremost are the changes in the United Nations Organization itself. My delegation would like to join with others in welcoming the appointment of Under-Secretary-General Dhanapala to head the new Department of Disarmament Affairs, given that his work over many years is so well known to us all. In the context of this topic, we are particularly encouraged that he will dedicate a part of his Department to the broad issue of conventional weapons, including practical disarmament measures.

From the establishment of the disarmament Department through to the establishment of consultative and management mechanisms to address cross-cutting issues, these reforms hold out great promise and are fully supported by Canada. One such cross-cutting issue, in our view, is consolidation of peace, which requires not only expertise that is found in political affairs and peacekeeping, but also arms-control expertise, which now has a particular concentration in the new Department. We agree that more thought needs to be given to weapons-related issues as an integral part of peace accords where the United Nations is involved in conflict resolution.

Secondly, we can derive satisfaction from the first meeting of the group of interested States established in accordance with General Assembly resolution 52/38 G, which took place last month. Its focus on practical disarmament measures, in the form of concrete projects, including information sharing, is most welcome and clearly demonstrates the level of interest in such matters. Furthermore, it demonstrates that our deliberations are not taking place in a vacuum, which should lend impetus to the successful conclusion of our work.

Linking these two points is the fact that present at the meeting in March were representatives of the three United Nations Departments of Disarmament Affairs, of Peacekeeping Operations and of Political Affairs. With so much experience upon which to draw, this can only augur well for the future and for that most important ingredient of success, effective coordination.

To conclude, may I simply add that my delegation will circulate a paper which, we believe, derives from the constructive discussion that took place last year and that we trust will reinforce our common sense of the importance of this topic.

Mr. Núñez-Mosquera (Cuba) (*interpretation from Spanish*): Allow me to congratulate you, Sir, on your election as Chairman of the Disarmament Commission at this session and to wish you success in your work. Your experience and knowledge of the issues augur well for our work, and you can count on the support of the Cuban delegation at all times. I should also like to take this opportunity to congratulate Ambassador García of Colombia on his excellent guidance of the work of the Commission last year.

In accordance with General Assembly resolution 52/12 B, the Disarmament Commission is to undertake a review of its work and report to the Assembly before the conclusion of the fifty-second session. Cuba believes that this Commission has a key role to play in the multilateral disarmament machinery as the sole specialized deliberative body with universal participation. The attempts that in one way or another have been and are being promoted by certain countries with the aim putting an end to the Commission or reducing its importance will not receive our support.

The Commission has for some years now been taking steps towards rationalizing its work, with concrete results such as the implementation of a three-item phased approach. Achieving a more effective interaction among the Disarmament Commission, the First Committee and the Conference on Disarmament, in the context of which the Commission would be able to consider and present to the other two forums concrete recommendations on high-priority items, should be the central objective of our efforts towards rationalization.

This deliberative body must continue to hold annual substantive sessions with a maximum duration of four weeks. Likewise, it should maintain the three-item phased approach, with three-year periods for the consideration of the items. In exceptional circumstances, and with the necessary consensus, consideration of certain items could be confined to two years or extended to four. The general debate at the beginning of the substantive session should continue to be held, and it should be ensured that all delegations that wish to do so can express their opinions in that debate.

Last year the Working Group on the item "Establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zone on the basis of arrangements freely arrived at among the States of the

region concerned" succeeded in identifying an important group of elements that will have to be dealt with in greater depth during the session that is beginning today. Questions relating to principles and to institutional arrangements will require particular attention.

While we recognize the tremendous importance of the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones, we must reiterate that these constitute partial security measures that require the simultaneous adoption of other measures aimed at eliminating nuclear weapons.

In the specific case of Cuba, our position in respect of the Treaty of Tlatelolco should be seen in the context of the special situation created by the policy of blockade and the aggressive climate fostered by governing circles in the United States against our country. While Cuba signed the Treaty in 1995 as a means of reaffirming its support for the objectives that inspire our region to work towards the denuclearization of Latin America and the Caribbean, the proper time for Cuba's ratification of that Treaty would be inextricably linked to a change in conditions that would allow a climate of peace and full respect to arise and be strengthened in relations between the two countries. This necessarily involves an end to the policy of aggression and the lifting of all restrictive measures against Cuba.

This must not be interpreted in any way as a deviation on our part from our unswerving commitment to the cause of Latin American integration, nuclear disarmament and the peaceful use of nuclear energy. Far be it from Cuba to put at risk the lofty and noble purposes enshrined in the Treaty of Tlatelolco.

Cuba has been a staunch proponent of the convening of a fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament. The reasons are clear: as has been reiterated in many declarations of the Non-Aligned Movement, that gathering would make it possible to evaluate the implementation of the Programme of Action adopted in 1978 and to draft new measures in the field of disarmament and related security issues.

In spite of the series of resolutions adopted by the General Assembly since 1994 calling for the convening of the fourth special session, any real possibility of its taking place seems to be growing fainter. It would be regrettable if the international community were obliged to shoulder the consequences of the obvious lack of interest displayed by a nuclear Power regarding the holding of that important event.

This year it is crucial that the Commission produce concrete results on this issue. The mechanism of consensus cannot continue to be manipulated with a view to postponing indefinitely the reaching of agreements on the objectives and the agenda of the fourth special session devoted to disarmament.

The complexities of the item entitled "Guidelines on conventional arms control/limitation and disarmament, with particular emphasis on consolidation of peace in the context of General Assembly resolution 51/45 N" are well known. The link between this and areas that are not yet well defined or that are frankly ambiguous, such as areas related to preventive diplomacy, the maintenance of peace and post-conflict peace-building, means that the Commission must focus its efforts on the disarmament component and not try to take on aspects that are beyond its mandate.

Consideration of this item must take into account the legitimate defence and security interests of States, as well as the specific characteristics of regions and countries in which there have been conflicts. Otherwise, dangerous imbalances would result that would place certain States at a disadvantage vis-à-vis others.

To illustrate the negative implications that such imbalances could have in the area of conventional weapons, I should like briefly to refer to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, which was opened for signature last December in Ottawa.

For Cuba, which fully shares the humanitarian concerns over the indiscriminate and irresponsible use of anti-personnel mines, especially in internal conflicts, renouncing the use of this type of weapon in defending its sovereignty and territorial integrity constitutes a challenge that we cannot afford to take up. As far as Cuba is concerned, the concept of a war fought by the people as a whole provides for the use of mines at the borders of our national territory exclusively for defensive purposes, with the objective of dealing with imminent threats or foreign aggression.

In conclusion, may I say that the Cuban delegation will participate actively in the consideration of the three substantive items on the Commission's agenda and intends to contribute with concrete proposals to the development of our work.

Mr. Vohidov (Uzbekistan) (*interpretation from Russian*): Allow me first to congratulate you, Sir, on your election as Chairman of our Commission and to express the confidence of the delegation of the Republic of Uzbekistan that your knowledge and experience will contribute to the successful outcome of the 1998 substantive session of the Disarmament Commission. Our congratulations also go to the other members of the Bureau on their election. I wish to assure you, Mr. Chairman, that the Bureau can count on the close cooperation of my delegation.

I also wish to thank your predecessor, Ambassador García, for his successful leadership at last year's session.

The 1998 substantive session of the Disarmament Commission is being held at a time when the international community and the United Nations Secretariat are paying increasing attention to disarmament issues. This is evident from the upgrading of the Centre for Disarmament Affairs to the level of a United Nations Department. In this regard, we are pleased to congratulate Ambassador Jayantha Dhanapala on his appointment as head of that Department with the rank of Under-Secretary-General.

The delegation of Uzbekistan stresses the significance of the fact that, among the priority activities of the Disarmament Commission, special importance is being attached to the issue of expanding the nuclear-weapon-free zones, which has been considered by the Commission over the last three years. This trend was highlighted as a separate item in the Final Document of the 1995 Review and Extension Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). The results of the 1995 Conference were welcomed in Uzbekistan with particular optimism and satisfaction, and its importance was confirmed by the documents of the first session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2000 Review Conference of the Parties to the NPT and by the agenda of this substantive session of the Disarmament Commission. We are sure that this issue will be considered a priority question at the forthcoming NPT Review Conference in the year 2000. It is also important in view of the fact that more than 100 countries have become parties to existing nuclear-weapon-free zones.

Uzbekistan fully supports the principle of the indivisibility of internal, regional and global security. One of the first steps taken by our country as a newly independent State was to accede to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. At the forty-eighth session of the General Assembly, in 1993, the President of Uzbekistan called upon the States of the region to declare Central Asia a nuclear-weapon-free zone, and we have moved consistently towards the fulfilment of that initiative.

One concrete confirmation of this policy was the convening of the International Conference entitled "Central Asia — Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone" in Tashkent from 14 to 16 September 1997, with the participation of high-level representatives of more than 60 countries and international organizations. That forum was a significant event in the history of the region. However, we are well aware that the process of establishing a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Central Asia will be a lengthy one that should be carried out within the framework of existing international agreements, in particular the NPT and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, and on a basis of accumulated international experience.

In this regard, a reliable system of collective efforts by States participating in this initiative should be developed at the regional level. Those efforts must establish a non-proliferation regime, ensure the ecological safety of hazardous industries involving nuclear raw materials and prevent leakage of nuclear technologies and materials.

At the international level, it is necessary to give priority to the settlement of regional problems in the context of their impact on the global situation. The phased advancement towards global security is possible only after we create secure and stable regions. In other words, when dealing with global problems, it is essential to follow the principle of moving from regionalism to globalism. In this regard, Uzbekistan highly appreciates the efforts of international organizations — above all the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the International Atomic Energy Agency — for their support of the Central Asian initiative.

In conformity with the provisions of the NPT — *inter alia*, its article VII — and paragraphs 5 to 7 of the "Principles and objectives for nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament", the leaders of the five Central Asian States, in the Almaty Declaration of 28 February 1997, stated their intention of establishing a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Central Asia, which was then confirmed by the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of those countries in a statement adopted in Tashkent on 15 September 1997. These facts can be cited as evidence of the political unity

and mutual understanding of the five countries of our region.

We note with satisfaction the adoption by the General Assembly of resolution 52/38 S of 9 December 1997, entitled "Establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Central Asia", in which, *inter alia*, the Assembly called upon all States to support the initiative aimed at the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Central Asia and requested the Secretary-General, within existing resources, to provide assistance to the Central Asian countries in the preparation of the form and elements of an agreement on the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Central Asia.

In our opinion, these documents create an effective basis for the elaboration of a legal framework for the regional treaty, and the States of the region note with satisfaction certain progress in the preparation of a draft of the future treaty on the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Central Asia. That is why we emphasize the hopes we pin on the assistance of the United Nations Department of Disarmament Affairs.

The existing nuclear-weapon-free-zone treaties share certain basic principles, but they also have special features that reflect the specific characteristics of each region. This is borne out by the Treaties of Tlatelolco, Pelindaba, Bangkok and Rarotonga, which have common basic principles as well as specific differences determined by the flexibility of the concept of the nuclear-weapon-free zone. We would like to underline that the drafting of the Central Asian treaty will be considered in the framework of the ecological state of the region.

In any case, the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones can contribute to nuclear non-proliferation and strengthen the peace and security not only of the regions concerned, but of the international community as a whole. In this regard, the initiative of the Government of Mongolia to establish a single-State nuclear-weapon-free zone in its territory deserves special attention. It is especially important that the zone comply with international law and internationally agreed criteria. As it is represented, the 30-year practice of establishing such zones requires a continued understanding of the zones, a definition of their institutional bases and their universalization.

The experience gained by Uzbekistan during its years of independence shows that the young democracies need to formulate and implement measures to strengthen national and regional security and to coordinate and integrate their compliance with international security norms with the activity of relevant international structures. In this regard, I would like to express our hope for the continued support of the international community for the initiative of the countries of our region to establish nuclear-weapon-free zone in Central Asia.

Mr. Sychou (Belarus) (*interpretation from Russian*): It is a special pleasure for my delegation to congratulate you, Sir, a representative of the Republic of Belarus, on your election to the important post of Chairman of the Disarmament Commission. We view your election as a reflection of the contribution that, in the context of the international community, the Republic of Belarus has made to the maintenance of international peace and security and to the disarmament process. We are convinced that under your guidance the Disarmament Commission will build on last year's results and pursue its own decisions and those of the General Assembly to consolidate its achievements and gain positive new results at this session. We also congratulate the other members of the Bureau. I wish moreover to thank your predecessor, Ambassador García, for his successful stewardship of the Disarmament Commission at its last session.

We welcome the establishment of the Secretariat's Department of Disarmament Affairs and the appointment of a well-known expert in the field, Ambassador Dhanapala, as Under-Secretary-General to head that Department. We also greet Mr. Petrovsky, Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament, who is in New York to participate in our session.

In recent years, the common nature of the task facing regions and countries as they set about implementing their international obligations under disarmament treaties has been underscored by rapprochement on a whole range of issues relating to the maintenance of international peace and security. Hence the importance that the great majority of States attach to recent events in the disarmament sphere, a number of which I shall now mention.

I begin with the indefinite extension of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) in 1995, and the consequent continuity in the implementation process. The following year, 1996, saw the signing of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) and the withdrawal of all Russian strategic missiles from our territory, which resulted in a broad space in our subregion free from nuclear weapons.

In 1997, the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects entered into force, and work began on the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. The Treaty between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on the Limitation of Anti-Ballistic Missile Systems (ABM Treaty) took on a multilateral dimension in September 1997, with the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding on Succession to the ABM Treaty by Belarus, Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation, Ukraine and the United States. Also in 1997, the Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction was finalized and opened for signature.

In recent years the international community has also seen the Review Conference of the States Parties to the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects, and in 1997 at Helsinki the Presidents of the Russian Federation and of the United States signed agreements relating to strategic stability, nuclear safety, nuclear security and the START III process.

These and many other no less important events constitute an impressive list of concrete steps towards general and complete disarmament. Only this morning, in fact, France and the United Kingdom deposited their instruments of ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty.

This sequence of events shows that disarmament — however critical the positions of certain States may have been — has now, at the end of the century, become a stable and ongoing process. As members know, Belarus has always been very active and has made a practical contribution in all areas of the disarmament process, from conventional to strategic nuclear weapons.

Of special importance is the continued development of regional efforts to create nuclear-weapon-free zones and to expand the space they encompass, by consolidating existing zones and establishing new ones. This is gradually giving form to a world-wide security system for the twenty-first century, which would bar the use of atomic energy for military purposes. Discussions on this subject over the last few years have enabled us to identify new features and nuances in the approaches taken by States to the notion of consolidating existing zones and creating new ones. In its activities in this sphere, Belarus has sought to ensure that the atmosphere in Central Europe — which the end of the cold war purged of suspicion, confrontational military blocs and the arms race — will be no less propitious for strengthening mutual understanding and trust among European peoples into the next century.

That was the focus of the initiative taken by the President of the Republic of Belarus, Mr. Alyaksandr Grigoryevich Lukashenka, to create a nuclear-weapon-free space in Central Europe. This is a logical extension of our own nuclear-disarmament measures. The matter of creating such a nuclear-weapon-free space was discussed at an international conference on that subject, held in 1997 at Minsk. This idea has been outlined in a number of documents of the General Assembly and various disarmament forums, including the Disarmament Commission. These include General Assembly document A/51/708 — in which the concept of creating a space free of nuclear weapons in Central and Eastern Europe is set out — and document A/CN.10/1997/WG.I/WP.9, submitted by the delegation of Belarus in 1997 for consideration by the Disarmament Commission's Working Group I. We hope that, along with other texts, this will form a basis for the Commission's work on final recommendations and a strategy for future international efforts in this area. It is our hope that the idea will be further developed at the present session.

Events of recent years, in both Europe and other regions of the world, show how the general trend towards collective support for national security interests has intensified through the conclusion of treaties and agreements made on a voluntary and mutually acceptable basis by interested countries. That trend, which has been graphically confirmed by the sessions of the principal disarmament forums, as well as by the General Assembly, calls for new approaches and initiatives in this area. These should be adapted to present-day realities as well as to prevailing trends in the approaches taken by a majority of countries to the problems of regional and global security.

Given these conditions, we believe it advisable to consider the idea of establishing in the subregions of Eastern Europe and the Baltic an area of good-neighbourly relations, stability and security, inviting as guarantors the Russian Federation and the United States. Such an initiative could be based on, *inter alia*, regional and subregional conferences, which have become an established practice. In this respect, we believe that promising developments include the increase in

disarmament measures in the European region and the reduction in the military presence and military activities in adjacent or bordering areas, the enhancement of transparency in military expenditure and the expansion of sharing information on military matters on a bilateral and multilateral basis, first and foremost at a regional level.

Further positive developments could include the conclusion of full-fledged bilateral and trilateral agreements on the establishment of good-neighbourly and friendly relations between adjacent countries, the holding of sub-regional conferences and initiatives in the field of international security, with broad consultations between the countries concerned. As they apply to Europe, these would include, in the framework of creating the architecture for European security in the twenty-first century, the preparation of a European security charter — the realization of the idea of a covenant of stability in Europe.

In practical terms, there is an urgent need to define long-term priorities in the field of disarmament and security, to harmonize the process of disarmament with the radical political transformations that have taken place in the world on the threshold of the twenty-first century and to change conditions so as to ensure the national security of States.

In discussing these problems of international security and disarmament in recent years, a general consensus has emerged on the need to begin negotiations on a convention to prohibit the production of fissile material for military purposes, to move towards a legally binding international instrument to assure non-nuclear-weapon States against the threat or use of nuclear weapons, to reduce further the nuclear arsenals of States and to develop and modernize the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms.

We believe that, in the trend towards international cooperation in disarmament in the short and medium term, priority should be given to efforts to include crimes relating to serious and intentional damage to the environment in the draft Code of Crimes against the Peace and Security of Mankind.

We welcome the idea of a treaty on nuclear security and stability with the participation of all the nuclear Powers, and the convening in 1999 of a conference for peace.

In the view of the majority of States, a fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament is called for to focus attention on these and many other issues. As a sponsor of the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly at its fifty-first and fifty-second sessions, Belarus considers that an important task of the fourth special session on disarmament should be to review experiences and assess the results of disarmament negotiations in the period following the cold war and to formulate priority disarmament tasks on the threshold of the next century and for the distant future.

Valuable guidelines in this respect have been set out in the United Nations medium-term plan for 1998-2001, providing for such activities as monitoring and evaluating present and future trends in disarmament and international security and identifying problems associated with and caused by the process of disarmament, including the economic and social consequences of disarmament, damage to the environment and conversion, which have not yet been resolved by the international community.

As for determining the mandate of the Disarmament Commission as it applies to the preparations for the fourth special session on disarmament, it would seem to be advisable not to depart from the recommendatory nature of the decisions of the Disarmament Commission. The adoption of decisions should be a prerogative of the preparatory committee for that special session.

The Disarmament Commission must also define the list of issues that will begin a new page in its history, leading it into the twenty-first century. Belarus, together with other sponsors of resolution 51/45 N, participated in the previous session of the Commission in drafting a working document, "Guidelines on conventional arms control/limitation and disarmament, with particular emphasis on consolidation of peace". The current session was preceded by a number of very useful international meetings and consultations on this subject.

Representatives of the Republic of Belarus are participating in working groups established by General Assembly resolutions on strengthening peace through practical disarmament measures and on light weapons. We participated with interest in the work of a number of other expert groups whose proposals we hope will help to ensure the success of the work of the Disarmament Commission this year.

As members know, the report and recommendations of the Tokyo International Conference on Preventive Diplomacy, which took place in January 1998, set out the importance within the system of a preventive strategy in this respect. This includes enhancing the effectiveness of

controls over the accumulation and trade in firearms and light weapons in areas of potential and existing conflicts.

The programme for the reduction of armaments in the Balkan region is one of the positive examples of the consolidation of peace through practical disarmament measures by many countries. Working Group III focused on drafting recommendations in this important area, and the delegation of Belarus intends actively to participate in that Working Group.

During the current session of the Disarmament Commission the question of rationalizing, streamlining and simplifying the Commission's activities will be considered. Together with other delegations, we intend to seek a decision on this very complicated and important issue. It has been recommended that, before the end of the fifty-second session of the General Assembly, we prepare proposals that will be acceptable to all.We hope for constructive consultations on this issue.

In conclusion, please allow me to assure you, Mr. Chairman, of the willingness of the delegation of Belarus to have a constructive dialogue and to be open with regard to our positions and intentions and, if necessary, to familiarize participants with the approach of Belarus to all of the issues on the agenda for this session.

The Chairman: I thank the representative of Belarus for the kind words he addressed to me.

Mrs. Castro de Barish (Costa Rica) (*interpretation from Spanish*): It is an honour for me, Sir, to convey to you my delegation's most sincere congratulations on your election to the chairmanship of this substantive session of the Disarmament Commission, and I wish to express those same congratulations to the other members of the Bureau. We are convinced that under your chairmanship we will enjoy a successful and productive session. I am also pleased to congratulate Ambassador Jayantha Dhanapala of India on his appointment to the position of Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs. We wish him every success in his important work.

I represent a State — Costa Rica — that has supported since their inception the efforts of the United Nations in the area of disarmament. We have always supported general and complete disarmament in all of its aspects. We are encouraged to note the recognition at this session of the special importance attached by the Secretary-General to the Centre for Disarmament Affairs through its elevation to the level of Department of Disarmament Affairs.

We take note of the fact that three items are going to be considered to which my own delegation attaches utmost importance. The first is the item entitled "Establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones on the basis of arrangements freely arrived at among the States of the region concerned". As Latin Americans, we feel very proud of the recent celebration of the anniversary of the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America, which was the first step towards the attainment of these goals. We wish also to highlight the entry into force last year of the Bangkok Treaty, which established a nuclear-weapon-free zone in South-East Asia, and the 1997 Almaty Declaration, adopted by the Heads of State of five countries of Central Asia, which laid the foundations for a new nuclear-weapon-free zone in Central Asia. Significant events such as the signing of the Treaty of Rarotonga by the United Kingdom, the United States and France, and the signing of the Treaty of Pelindaba are cause for celebration, and we hope that this trend will continue. We are convinced that the substantive work of the Commission will make a very valuable contribution towards the attainment of these objectives.

Another very important item on the agenda of the Disarmament Commission concerns the prompt convening of the fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament (SSOD IV). My delegation enthusiastically supported this proposal in the First Committee during the current session of the General Assembly, and we reiterate the conviction expressed in the eighth preambular paragraph of resolution 52/38 F, which states that

> "a special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament can set the future course of action in the field of disarmament, arms control and related international security matters".

It is our hope, therefore, that it will be possible to achieve consensus on its objectives and its agenda so that the fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament can be held in the near future.

The next item is "Guidelines on conventional arms control/limitation and disarmament, with particular emphasis on consolidation of peace in the context of General Assembly resolution 51/45 N". Here it is important to recall the first preambular paragraph of that resolution — adopted without a vote — which reaffirms the purpose of the United Nations to maintain peace and security and, in this context, reaffirms in particular the role of the United Nations in the field of disarmament, as

well as the commitment of Member States to take concrete steps in order to strengthen that role — that is to say, the protagonism of the world Organization and the Disarmament Commission in this respect. All of this has no doubt helped to strengthen the Disarmament Commission.

In this morning's debate, at the 219th meeting, emphasis was placed on the fact that the work of the Commission could be organized even more efficiently than it has been in the past. We are grateful for the suggestion by the representative of Colombia, who said:

> "Among the various measures that could be taken, we believe that — with a view to appropriate participation by all delegations, including the smaller ones — a desirable one would be that the Working Groups not meet simultaneously."

My delegation is among that group of small delegations, and for this reason we find this suggestion very useful and fair.

My delegation believes that the guidelines on conventional arms control/limitation and disarmament are very important, because this is the type of weapons that most affects developing countries. We agree with the statement of the representative of Bangladesh in this respect, because the developing countries are the greatest users, and the greatest victims, of these conventional weapons.

My delegation is also extremely concerned about the indiscriminate use of other, treacherous weapons that harm poor, innocent people who are not even aware of the conflicts in which these weapons are so widely used. I am referring to anti-personnel mines, which the late but not forgotten Jim Grant — then Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) — so eloquently spoke of in 1993, suggesting, before the Commission on Human Rights, that they should be prohibited and destroyed. Subsequently, his successor — the current Executive Director of UNICEF, Carol Bellamy — has also warned against these perverse weapons, whose principal victims are women and children.

For a long time, the idea of a moratorium was upheld. But that was tantamount to keeping the weapons for some time and then selling them at a higher price, in spite of the fact that they are so inexpensive to produce and so costly to remove. We are already aware of the tragic and traumatic effect of these weapons on all people, be they children, young people or adults.

My delegation wishes here to express one of Costa Rica's convictions. At this session, a resolution entitled "Culture of peace "was adopted in plenary. The objective of the culture of peace is, of course, to replace the culture of war. For this reason, we believe that if the political will can be mustered to begin to replace the culture of war with the culture of peace, this would have a very favourable impact on all disarmament efforts.

My delegation associates itself with those who have expressed the hope that the deliberations of the Disarmament Commission at this session will make a positive and valuable contribution to our desired goals. Mr. Chairman, you can count on our full support for your efforts at this 1998 substantive session.

The meeting rose at 4.30 p.m.